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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000359

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV
USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM BM](#) [NLD](#) [ASSK](#)

SUBJECT: NLD COMMENTS ON PRISONER RELEASES, INTIMIDATION,
AND MANDALAY RALLY

Classified By: DCM RON MCMULLEN FOR REASON 1.5(D).

11. (SBU) Summary: On March 18, NLD Central Executive Committee members told Embassy officials that the SPDC included 3 NLD prisoners in the 45 prisoners released on March 16. However, the NLD also charged that the SPDC continues to condone, if not direct, harassment of the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi. The prisoner releases are the first since last November and are probably linked to Special Rapporteur Pinheiro's visit this week. End Summary.

Three NLD Prisoners Released

12. (SBU) On March 16, the SPDC announced the release of 45 prisoners described as "elder inmates, females, either pregnant or with young children, and those incarcerated for disturbing peace and tranquility." The announcement was provided to the local press but, as far as we have ascertained, not to the diplomatic community. The SPDC has made similar releases of pregnant women and women with children over the past year at the request of Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Sergio Pinheiro. With Pinheiro arriving in Rangoon on March 19, it may be that the prisoner release was motivated by his visit, although the SPDC has not made the connection explicit.

13. (C) According to NLD CEC members, there were 3 NLD members among those released. One of the NLD prisoners is elderly and another has epilepsy, according to the NLD, so the organization was pleased to have them out of prison. That said, the CEC members went on to note that these are the first NLD prisoners released since last November and that there are many other elderly and sick NLD prisoners still in prison. NLD Secretary U Lwin also stated that the identities of the 115 prisoners the regime claims to have released in November have never been clarified.

Pamphlets Attack ASSK and Authorities Harass NLD Members

14. (C) The NLD CEC members said that the distribution of defamatory pamphlets against Aung San Suu Kyi continues at many locations throughout the country. The NLD leaders found it implausible that the regime cannot identify those distributing the pamphlets when it closely monitors all citizens' activities, especially the publishing and distribution of written materials.

15. (C) The NLD leaders said that, since February, there has also been an increase in repression against NLD members at locations throughout the country. They cited the following examples: a) authorities discouraged NLD members from working at the NLD office in Kawthaung, the southernmost town in Burma; b) an NLD Member of Parliament elect in southern Shan State was told by local authorities to resign from a position he held at a local monastery; and c) authorities in Bago questioned and harassed the landlord of the NLD office there. NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe argued that while local officials took these actions against NLD members, they may have been done at the direction of central authorities. U Aung Shwe noted in particular that in some of the locations where harassment is occurring relations between the NLD and local authorities have traditionally been good.

Ex-members and USDA Hold Anti-NLD Rally in Mandalay

16. (C) The NLD CEC members said recent press reports regarding an anti-NLD rally in Mandalay on March 9 were true. Two ex-NLD members organized the rally with support from Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) members. The rally denouncing the NLD was held in Kanaung Hall, which is owned by Minister of Industry-1 Aung Thaung; a former a Military Intelligence officer and current USDA official.

17. (C) Comment: The release of the 45 prisoners, including the 3 NLD members, is probably directly linked to Special Rapporteur Pinheiro's visit this week. Pinheiro will almost certainly urge the regime to release the political prisoners as soon as possible, as he has often done in the past. Whether these urgings will have any more impact than they have in the recent past remains to be seen, particularly in view of the NLD's allegations of increased regime harassment.

End Comment.
Martinez